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ABSTRACT

The method used for assessing German language majors and minors at Bradley University (Illinois) is described. The method uses multiple assessment techniques, and has seven parts: (1) a re-taking of the German entry placement examination; (2) review of results of a two-part exit survey (questionnaire appended), designed to obtain information about student satisfaction with the program and self-assessed language skills; (3) a selection of externally administered German achievement examinations; (4) determination of majors and minors who have qualified for membership in foreign language honor societies; (5) maintenance of student portfolios, containing documentation of accomplishments in various courses taken, including oral language performance; (6) course grades; and (7) statements from student employers/supervisors in jobs requiring some use of German skills. (MSE)

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ED 428 583

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF GERMAN ANNUAL MEETING
CHICAGO, IL/NOVEMBER 20-22, 1998

PRESENTER: Dr. William Walker/Professor and Chairperson, Department of Foreign Languages and Program in Western European Studies, Bradley University, Peoria, IL 61625

TITLE OF PRESENTATION: "Comprehensive Exit Assessment for Undergraduate German Language Majors/Minors"

LENGTH OF PRESENTATION: 20 minutes

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Most American college and university teachers are by now increasingly more accustomed to the use of student course evaluations as one measure for determining teaching effectiveness. Such evaluations generally serve as a measure for determining both subjective and objective student perceptions of such matters as course organization, course planning and preparation, clarity of presentation, student/teacher interaction and rapport, course grading, and student self-assessment of the extent of learning, among other elements which could be cited. Not only are the results of such student course evaluations shared with the faculty for informational purposes, but many colleges and universities use such student evaluations for judgmental purposes, specifically in such areas as determining salary increases as well as in making tenure and promotion decisions.

The results of over 1,600 separate research studies on student assessment are leading us to conclude, however, that no one single assessment mechanism is adequate in and of itself to adequately provide valid, demonstrable conclusions as to the extent of student learning and teaching effectiveness, as well as to provide critical feedback to faculty in terms of reassessing teaching strategies and goals necessary for enhancing the student learning process.

Given the increasingly more vocal calls for faculty instructional accountability for the quality and effectiveness of our job performance, as mandated primarily by our employers, by our students, and by our support and governance networks, we need to continue work on developing additional strategies apart from the conventional student evaluation mechanisms to prove more demonstrably and conclusively that we are in fact meeting our goals for providing quality foreign language education for our students.

In light of these introductory remarks, it should be observed that we, as educators, face enormous challenges when reviewing viable assessment options vis-à-vis the student learning assessment issue. Given the pluralistic, diverse nature of American society generally and American colleges and universities specifically, the wholesale use of state-mandated subject matter exit examinations as a prerequisite for earning the undergraduate degree appear highly unlikely in the near, and some would argue, the distant future as well.

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William Walker

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Nevertheless, many professional accreditation agencies external to our colleges and universities do, as a matter of practice, administer their own subject matter qualifying examinations to our graduates, and the results of those examinations are often routinely shared with colleges and universities for purposes of keeping us abreast as to how we are doing in preparing our students for their professional work and, in some cases, renewing our accreditation status.

In light of the assessment challenges facing us, I wish to comment in the course of my preparation on one multiple assessment method devised by the faculty in our department which may be of some value to you as German language educators when devising responses to those calls for greater instructional accountability. The multiple assessment process to which I am referring is designated as "comprehensive exit assessment for undergraduate German language majors and minors." The exit assessment procedure to which I am referring is offered to the graduating students on an optional basis; however, since department policy requires all departmentally prepared reference letters to make specific reference to the student's assessment, our graduates, almost without exception, elect most, if not all of the options. If you will refer to the handout which I have prepared and distributed, you will observe that the major components of our exit assessment process is divided into seven areas.

I. The first of these seven areas involves a retake of the original German language entry placement examination. It is a relatively common practice for all entering foreign language students with prior high school language study to take a foreign language placement examination prior to enrolling in college/university level language coursework. For assessment purposes, all graduating German language majors and minors are accorded the opportunity to retake the German placement examination and to compare the results with the original placement scores. For those students who transfer to our school from another college or university with German language credit, we accord these students opportunity to take the German language placement examination on an elective basis upon entry to our school, and subsequently allow those students with statistical information on file to retake the placement examination upon graduation for informational purposes. The exit placement test results may be entered on the student's permanent transcript at the discretion of the student.

II. The second element in our exit assessment process involves a review of the results of our two-part graduation exit survey, a copy of which I have attached to the handout. The overarching objective of this activity is to obtain information that will be useful to the department in getting a final sense for students' satisfaction with their program of German language study as well as a student determination of their German language ability levels upon graduation in such specific areas as listening comprehension, speaking proficiency, reading ability, writing ability, applied linguistics or phonetics, culture and civilization, translation, grammar and syntax, sensitivity to and awareness of cultural differences, and professional preparation. In short, we are saying to the students that we value what they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of their program of study as well as a determination of their ability level in the different areas cited. Further, since we consider academic advisement as part and

parcel of the instructional process, we also allow the students to comment at length upon the quality of their academic advisement while students in our department. As a corollary to the exit survey, this form can be modified for purposes of enabling departmental alumni to provide input into their perceived ability levels at the time of graduation. The form might also be modified as to enable the alumni to document their personal and professional success on the basis of their foreign language education. Such items for assessment could include: 1) prizes, honors, and distinctions; 2) employment success; 3) success in the election and completion of additional educational opportunities involving foreign language following graduation; 4) results of licensing examinations; and 5) any anecdotal evidence which enables the faculty to gain additional insight into the students' application of their language ability to life situations, such as travel abroad, community activities such as hosting a foreign student, and so forth.

III. A third element in the assessment process involves the use of externally administered achievement examinations. We in the area of German Studies are particularly fortunate to have a wide array of different externally administered achievement examinations available to our students: the Goethe Institut administers five different achievement examinations in the United States annually, including Das Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache, Zentrale Mittelstufenpruefung, Kleines und Grosses Deutsches Sprachdiplom, Pruefung Wirtschaftsdeutsch International, and the Zertifikat Deutsch fuer den Beruf. Particularly appropriate for our purposes are the Zentrale Mittelstufenpruefung, offered twice a year, and equivalent to a minimum of four years of German language study at American colleges and universities; For our business students, the PWD, offered once a year, is particularly well-suited for testing a high level of written and oral proficiency in Business German, whereas the Zertifikat Deutsch fuer den Beruf, offered once a year, certifies that the students can communicate in general, typical occupational situations. The proficiency requirements for the ZDFB are less than for the PWI, with a knowledge level equivalent to that of the ZDAF, that of the intermediate level German.

The Center for Applied Linguistics offers the German Speaking Test for those who prefer audio-tape mediated examinations, and the more familiar Oral Proficiency Interviews may be conducted by an ACTFL certified rater on a one-to-one basis with the student. Other routinely externally-administered examinations involve professional certification examinations such as those administered to foreign language majors involved in teacher education programs or foreign language majors certified by the American Society of Translators. The students are encouraged to submit copies of the examination score reports to the departmental assessment coordinator as yet another means of measuring language mastery.

IV. A fourth area in the student assessment process involves a compilation of the numbers of German language majors and minors who qualify annually for membership in foreign language honor societies. One of the most familiar language honor societies, for example, is Phi Sigma Iota, presently housed at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, which requires that eligible candidates be either a junior or senior, have completed at least three three-hundred level foreign language courses, and have maintained a minimum 3.00 or higher overall

grade point average and a minimum 3.00 or higher overall grade point average in the major/minor language.

V. A fifth area in the student assessment process which I am recommending for your consideration is the maintenance of a student folio. Should the student begin a program of German language study at the elementary or intermediate integrated skills level, representative documentation which could be included in the folio might include a copy of the comprehensive final examination or a copy of one of the individual course examinations which best illustrates the student's ability level in that particular course. Appropriate documentation for a conversation course might include an end-of-the semester tape-recorded oral interview with the student; a particularly well-written essay as well as particularly effective daily journal entries might be drawn from a composition course. Representative examinations, be they objective or essay in nature, as well as particularly representative individual projects, might be drawn from upper-level content coursework in literature and culture as well as specialized coursework such as translation or commercial German. Appropriate documentation for the folio might include anecdotal evidence such as letters written by the student in German from a study abroad site or while traveling abroad. The overarching objective is to assemble in the folio representative documentation in each of the major skills and content areas which attest objectively to the German language achievement level of the student throughout their entire period of study at the home institution.

VI. In spite of growing national concerns about rampant grade inflation, course grades remain a major feature of student academic assessment. At the end of each semester, the student's academic advisor would make arrangements with the Registrar or other responsible office to receive a copy of the students' grade report. It should be the responsibility of the academic advisor of the individual student to review the semester grade report for the respective advisee and assess the pattern of academic achievement demonstrated by the student through a comparative analysis of earlier as well as present course grades in the different skills and content-oriented coursework. In cooperation with our computer center, I have devised a grade analysis report which statistically summarizes the individual grades given by each instructor in the department for each course taught. For those departments where there are several instructors teaching the same course, such statistical analyses provide extremely useful and illuminating documentation as to present grading procedures within the department. It is also quite easy to construct a computer program in which the history of the grading results of individual instructors for different courses can be maintained and reviewed in terms of assessing grading similarities and differences within the department. For comparative and contrastive purposes, we also carefully review the study abroad grade results for skills and content coursework for our individual majors and minors and establish patterns of grade correlation between the grades received at the home institution and the study abroad site. Our own experience has been that the level of correlation is quite high between the grade results for individual instructors within our department as well as with the study aborad grade results; such results serve to underscore significantly the validity of the departmental assessment findings.

VII. An increasingly larger number of our German majors and minors are eager to apply their insights and skills to employment and/or service opportunities which require some use of the German language. For those students who elect such activity, we request that the student's primary supervisor prepare a statement for our use in which the supervisor, if qualified to do so, comments upon the ease, accuracy, and effectiveness with which the language skills were utilized in the performance of work/service-related assignments. Such statements, we find, are particularly valuable in assessing the ability of the students to apply insights and skills drawn from the classroom to the actuality of the world outside the classroom.

CONCLUDING REMARKS. In conclusion, many of my remarks do not constitute startling new discoveries for those practitioners among us who have been in the classroom for a considerable period of time. If taken as a whole, however, the individual elements of a comprehensive exit assessment plan, designed to suit the needs of individual departments, can lead to useful, and I feel, valid, defensible conclusions concerning the level of student achievement in our discipline. Obviously, the process of assessing student academic achievement is an ongoing process which is subject to periodic change and modification in accordance with the evolution of higher education in the United States and in accordance with the department's experience with the process of comprehensive exit assessment. In any case, it is important to note that if exit assessment is to have value and usefulness, the faculty advisors must be committed to carrying through with the assessment process during the duration of their individual advisees' period of study. Also, in order for the department to gain insight into the perceived achievement level of each of its individual advisees as well as to draw meaningful conclusions about general patterns which emerge during the assessment review process, it is the responsibility of the chair or designated representative to prepare and issue an end-of-the-year assessment report which summarizes majors and minors achievement levels, based upon the data collected. As I stated at the beginning of my presentation, and wish to restate once again, we are being held increasingly more accountable both individually and collectively for the extent of subject matter mastery for our graduating German majors and minors; it behooves us to become our own agency for accountability, and I am hopeful that exit assessment strategies may prove to be a viable tool in that overall process.

APPENDIX I

STUDENT EXIT ASSESSMENT
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES/GERMAN
BRADLEY UNIVERSITY

The Department of Foreign Languages sponsors an end-of-semester two-part assessment of graduating German language majors and minors in order to determine a) students' perceptions of their various German language ability levels at the time of graduation; and b) students' level of satisfaction with their German language major/minor program of study while at Bradley University. The overarching objective of this assessment activity is to obtain information which will enable the continuous improvement of the German language program through multiple evaluation procedures which measure outcomes with stated departmental and university goals.

The Department of Foreign Languages would appreciate your willingness to take a few minutes and complete the attached two-part assessment questionnaire. Please return the completed questionnaire to the secretary of the Department of Foreign Languages in the stamped, addressed envelope provided you. You will not be asked to identify yourself on form II in order to maintain complete confidentiality and to encourage total candor. Both Form I and Form II assessments will not be reviewed until after you have graduated from the university.

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ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (FORM I)

A. Name of Student: _____

B. Name of Faculty Advisor: _____

C. I am a (circle one): German language major German language minor

D. Semester and Year of Graduation from Bradley University: _____

E. Foreign Language Honors Received at Bradley University:

F. Work Experiences Relating to Major/Minor During Period of Study at Bradley University: (please include the number of months for each work experience and provide a brief job description).

G. Externally-Administered Language Proficiency Examinations (cite name of examination and rating).

H. Please Use the Following Rating Scale for Each Item in Order to Rate Your Perceived Foreign Language Ability Level upon Graduation from Bradley. (* Adapted in part from Modern Language Association Guidelines for Language Proficiency)

Very Good			Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
5			4	3	2	1

5 4 3 2 1 Listening Comprehension (Ability to follow closely and with relative ease all types of standard speech)

5 4 3 2 1 Speaking Proficiency (Ability to speak with a high degree of accuracy and ease, imitating closely native speech in terms of pronunciation. Ability to exchange ideas effectively and to feel comfortable in a wide variety of social situations)

5 4 3 2 1 Reading Ability (Ability to determine major controlling ideas and patterns of organization contained within a wide range of texts and to understand or infer most content meaning contained within those texts without frequent use of a foreign language dictionary)

5 4 3 2 1 Writing Ability (Ability to write on a wide variety of subjects with relative naturalness, ease of expression, and a high degree of accuracy)

5 4 3 2 1 Applied Linguistics/or Phonetics (A good working knowledge of phonetics or the theory and practice of descriptive and historical linguistics)

5 4 3 2 1 Culture and Civilization (A well-developed knowledge of the dominant intellectual, political, economic, social, aesthetic, spiritual, geographical, and technological components of the foreign culture)

5 4 3 2 1 Translation (Ability to translate non-technical documents from the foreign language into the English language with a high degree of accuracy)

5 4 3 2 1 Grammar and Syntax (A solid knowledge and mastery of the major elements of the grammar and syntax of the foreign language)

5 4 3 2 1 (If Applicable) Professional Preparation (Through means of independent study, practica, cooperative education, and restricted topics coursework (Commercial, etc.), a good working command of the foreign language skills and content-based knowledge important for success in using the foreign language in your chosen profession)

5 4 3 2 1 Sensitivity to and Awareness of Cultural Differences (A heightened sensitivity to and awareness of both similarities and differences which exist between American culture and the foreign culture studied)

5 4 3 2 1 (If applicable) General Assessment of the Value of Your Study Abroad Experiences in the Development of Foreign Language Skills

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (FORM II)

Your Academic Advisor's Name: _____

I am a (circle one): German language major German language minor

A. Please Use the Following Rating Scale for Each Item in Order to Rate Your Perceived Level of Satisfaction with Your German Language Major/Minor at Bradley University

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

5 4 3 2 1 A. Overall quality of instruction in the foreign language.

5 4 3 2 1 B. Overall quality of the faculty.

5 4 3 2 1 C. Overall quality of the library holdings for the foreign language.

5 4 3 2 1 D. Overall quality and usefulness of the foreign language laboratory.

5 4 3 2 1 E. Overall quality of the course offerings in your major/minor program.

5 4 3 2 1 F. Overall breadth of the program coursework in your major/minor program.

Please cite any areas in which you feel improvement should be made:

_____

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B. Academic Advisement Exit Survey.

The faculty in the Department of Foreign Languages see academic advisement as an integral part of your overall development while studying at Bradley University. In order to determine the extent to which academic advisement contributed to your success as a student, please take a few minutes and respond to the questions cited below. Circle your responses on the basis of the following scale:

1 -- Strongly Disagree
2 -- Disagree
3 -- Neutral
4 -- Agree
5 -- Strongly Agree
NA -- Not Applicable

1. My academic advisor provided me with adequate time and availability for advisement. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

2. My academic advisor appeared genuinely interested in my academic development. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

3. Prior to making recommendations for course selection, my advisor solicited my input. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

4. My advisor clearly explained the academic requirements for my subject matter area. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

5. My advisor clearly explained the general academic requirements established by the university. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

6. My advisor was aware of my individual abilities, interests, and earlier achievement levels when making suggestions and recommendations. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

7. My advisor was aware of my career goals and provided me with appropriate advisement on career-related matters. 1 2 3 4 5 NA